



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Dance Undergraduate Theses

Dance

5-2-2016

We Remain Artists: A Photographic/Ethnographic Installation

Sydney Kramer

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/dance_theses



Part of the [Dance Commons](#), [Other Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#), and the [Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kramer, Sydney, "We Remain Artists: A Photographic/Ethnographic Installation" (2016). *Dance Undergraduate Theses*. 82.

https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/dance_theses/82

This Campus Access only theses is brought to you for free and open access by the Dance at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dance Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

WE REMAIN ARTISTS:

A Photographic/Ethnographic Installation

DANC 461: Sr Thesis Project

By Sydney Kramer

May 2, 2016

Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1: Genesis of the project..... 3
2. Chapter 2: Outline of your process.... 8
3. Chapter 3: Final Results..... 16
4. Chapter 4: Future Plans..... 22



Chapter 1: Genesis of the project

With the ultimate goal of creating an opportunity for an audience to become apart of my thesis experience rather than just observe, I created *We Remain Artists*. From the moment I learned about the Senior Thesis project freshman year, I knew I wanted to create a project that I had never witnessed before. Recognizing that my personal journey throughout the dance department was specific to my personality, my thesis project needed to develop in the same way. Hoping to gain insight to the thesis process from my fellow LMU seniors, I unfortunately had only came across thesis presentations that were centered on the creation of choreography. Although these works proved to be extraordinary and reflective of each dancer, I was not an individual that was drawn to the opportunity to choreograph. Witnessing most of my peers travel along a clear path through their thesis projects, I initially struggled to find an opportunity to create through the representation of dance. Unfortunately I recognized an immediate battle towards the development of a thesis project that I felt was substantial to my own individuality. Wanting my project to be a true representation of both my personality as well as my passions, I began imagining opportunities in which I could showcase myself. Hoping to develop a plethora of options, my mind continued to center around the concept of visual arts. Maintaining an appeal for contemporary art, specific to modern galleries and museums, I recognized my own desire to create an art installation.

The moment I decided upon the concept of an art installation, the idea felt natural to my overall representation of experiences within LMU. Although I had maintained a passion for photography from a very young age, it was not until my sophomore year that I participated in my first collegiate photography course. I was immediately drawn to the

development of my artistic voice through a photography medium. While many of my projects within the courses naturally centered upon my interest in dance, my thesis project was one of the first opportunities I was given to dictate the concentration of the photographs. Following no direct prompt, I was given the freedom to create an experience for my audience based upon any notion of my choosing. Although initially unsure of the exact theme with which my project would follow, I knew that an integration and murgence of photography and dance would be highly representative of my experience as a student at LMU.

In developing a topic that my installation could center around, I searched for a prospect to mirror my maturation throughout college. Coming to LMU with thousands of preconceived notions towards the dance industry, my experience specifically within the dance department instigated a transformation in personal opinion. My professors constantly advocated for intellectual reflection towards the mindset of a dancer. Over the course of four years, my judgments towards dance, both commercial and concert, took on new directions. I was able to understand that thoughts towards dance never contained a right or wrong answer. Following the mechanics of an art form, there was always the accepted possibility for interpretation and opinion. Specific to the creation of my thesis project, topics began to surface around societal projections onto dance. Although I could have chosen from thousands of themes, I specifically wanted the opportunity to focus on a topic that I had gained new perspective through my college experience.

Before attending courses within the LMU dance department, I was always fixated on the assumption that a dancer could only perform for a specific amount of time, that there was an expiration date. Begging my mom to allow for me to pursue a professional career

in dance straight after high school, I remained anxious towards the “small window” of opportunity that a dancer would be able to perform. Because of the knowledge I have gained towards possibilities within the dance industry, my entire mindset has shifted regarding the subject of age. Previously focusing specifically on completion settings within my youth, I was unaware of the infinite potentials a dancer could have throughout the entirety of their lives. Recognizing an opportunity for societal growth, I created my thesis project based upon this personal advancement within my mentality.

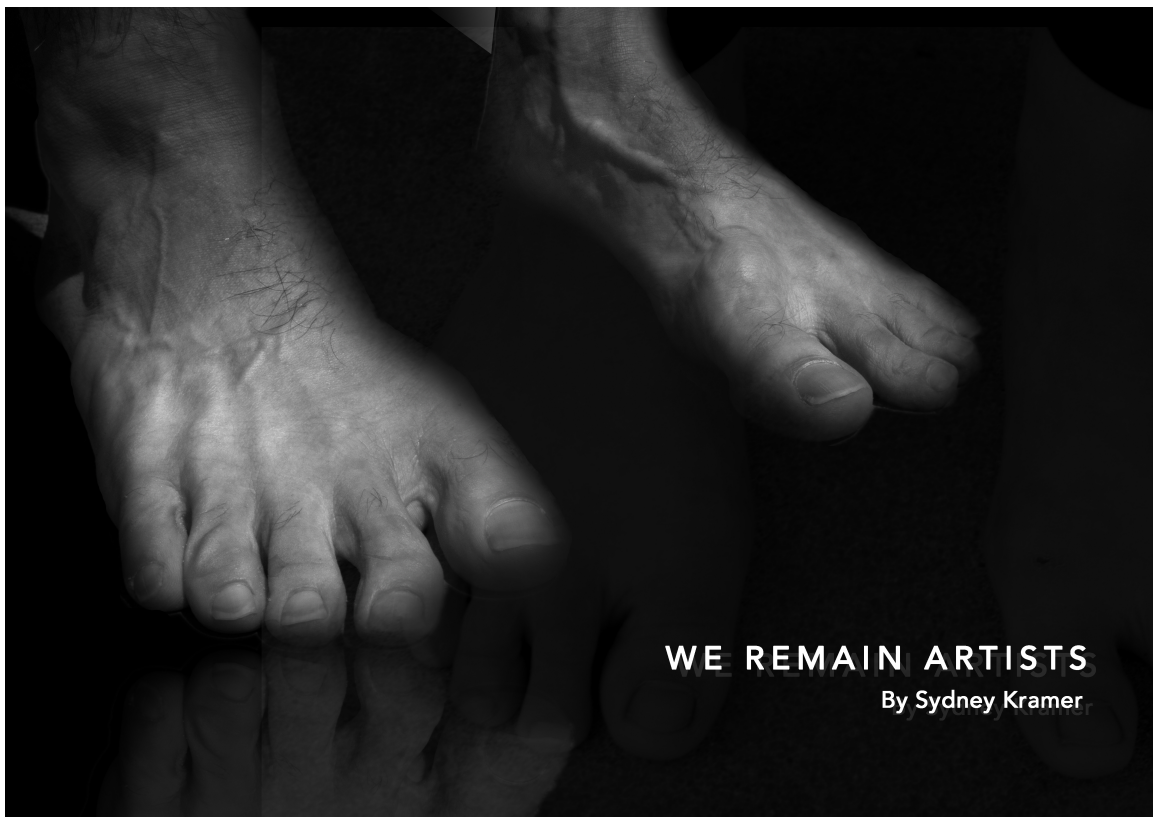
Specific to the mentality I now maintain throughout my senior year of college, I could have never before attempted a project with such an impactful theme. Sophomore year I was lucky enough to take a course with my eventual thesis mentor, Kristen Smiarowski entitled, *I Am Therefore I Dance*. While at the time I was unaware of the impact this course would have upon my mentality towards dance, Kristen enabled a voice of change within my mind. Before this course, I selfishly allowed for dance to act as a healing mechanism specific to my life. Focused on the assumption that I benefitted from its healing and changing influences, I had not previously questioned how I could utilize my creative voice in order to impact societal change. Kristen specifically encouraged the study of choreographer and social activist, Bill T. Jones, demonstrating the impact a single dancer could have upon the world. While Jones tackled concepts such as race and sexual orientation within society, I was amazed by the shift in attitudes he instigated. Kristen showcased countless individuals that strived to enable social change within the course as I slowly began to recognize the importance of my own artistic voice. With Bill T. Jones and other activists that she introduced in mind, I hoped to instigate a social change through the body of my work. Utilizing creative expression through the dance and

photographic mediums, I hoped to enable a transformation towards the discriminatory notions focused around the age of a dancer.

Over the course of a two-month period, I photographed and interviewed dancers ranging in ages from ten to eighty. Hoping my audience would gain newfound ideas towards the subject of age, this wide variety became imperative to a full representation of the entire dance community. Developing a systematic approach to each encounter with my subjects, I met with each dancer following a specific structure. First directing a series of movements, I photographed with the intention of gaining four photographs for each subject. I then instigated an interview process in which I carried out an informal dialogue with my subjects through a series of questions. Unknowing of whether or not I would eventually incorporate this information into my final project, I hoped that I would at least gain personal understanding through the questions I asked. Never could I have imagined that the incorporation of an interview process throughout my installation would quickly become my favorite aspect to the piece. While the photographs enabled an immediate visual understanding and aesthetic, the audio recordings allowed for my audience to immerse themselves within the minds of each dancer within my project. I feel as though the incorporation visual as well as audio material lead to the success of my installation as a whole.

We Remain Artists became a photographic installation that immersed an audience in a visual and audio journey through the ages of a dancer. Based upon the notion of motion remaining imperative to dance, I developed a system for my audience to view the photographs as if watching a performance. With this project, I hoped to shed light on one of the many fears our society can project onto individuals within the dance and

entertainment industries. Through photography and audio recordings, I created an interactive experience for my audience to develop newfound ideas towards the subject of age. One of the greatest lessons I can take away from my experience as a dance student at LMU is to push limits beyond what was thought as “possible.” My thesis has become just one of the many manifestations of this idea that I hope to create. In my future, I hope to hold in exceed all expectations.



Chapter 2: Outline of your process

Developed entirely through my own evolution in mentality towards age, my thesis project evolved alongside my understanding of creative voice. As I finally decided upon an art installation for my thesis project, I began by visiting museums and galleries throughout the Los Angeles area. Hoping to gain inspiration for my eventual thesis project, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) as well as The Broad Museum, both located in downtown Los Angeles, offered creative outlets that I would be able to draw from. Specifically intrigued by an installation within The Broad, Ragnar Kjartansson developed a video installation that motivated my own artistic expression. Kjartansson transformed an entire room within the museum, displaying fifteen different videos of musicians onto various walls. While each musician was filmed and displayed in a different location, all together they continued to play a song through webcam technology. By witnessing the installation Kjartansson produced, I began to brainstorm around the idea of different perspectives of a dancer. While all dancers share a passion and love of movement, their mindsets continue to shift apart from anyone else. I developed a need to display this individuality through a photographic installation.

Although excited about the opportunity to develop a photographic installation, I initially struggled to secure a theme for my project. While I continued to brainstorm various topics, nothing seemed to feel as significant as I would have hoped. Questioning friends and family for inspiration, the concept of time became a vehicle I was intrigued with. Unaware of the direction I would take, I knew that my concentration upon the topic of time would inspire my own creative expression. Initially I hoped to display the idea of stopping time

within my photographs. Playing with the idea of utilizing a fast or slow shutter speed on my camera, I wanted the audience to witness the manipulation of time throughout a photo. Although I found this idea entirely captivating, I struggled with the opportunity to incorporate dance into the project. Hoping to figure out a direction to go in later, I began contacting various LMU dance students as subjects for my project. While every person I contacted was eager to help, my inability to explain the project began to hinder my overall excitement.

While I knew I was close to an idea, it was not until talking with a childhood friend that I finally developed a concept for my project. I explained to her my fascination with time in relation to dance, but I did not know how to portray this throughout my project. Although she was unaware of approaching me with assistance, she eventually suggested the use of a wide range of ages in order to create depth to my work. From the moment she said introduced age into my mind, I knew this would become the direction of my project. I had previously been confused about incorporating dance within the realm of time, but age became the perfect opportunity to discuss a notion that society had portrayed on all dancers from the start. Through my photographic installation, I would gain the opportunity to hopefully shift the minds of my audience.

Recognizing I would need a wide variety of ages throughout my subjects, I began contacting dancers I felt would develop my story to the best extent. I chose my subjects based upon a mix of gender, race, and appearance on camera. Although I knew I could utilize the amazing dancers and professors throughout the LMU dance department, I became worried about finding a younger and older dancer. These two subjects became crucial to the overall structure of my project. Remembering I had babysat for a younger boy

a couple of years ago, he had previously shown an interest in taking dance classes. After contacting his mom and learning of his commitment to ballet since I had last seen him, I asked her permission to have him become my first subject in the project. The moment his mom allowed for me to utilize his dance knowledge and performance ability, my thesis took shape. I contacted five dancers centered around LMU, basing my decision off of their appearance and voice within the dance department. They included: Sarina Ortiz, Gigi Axelrode, Brandon Mathis, Rosalynde LeBlanc Loo, and Damon Rago. Varying in age and position within the department, I felt as though their experiences would all pull from various instances and memories within their lives. My final subject remained the most special to me, as I gained the opportunity to interview and photograph my 80-year-old grandma. In finally gaining agreement from all of my dancers, my thesis project could finally begin.

While I kept in close contact with Teresa during her sabbatical, I voiced to her my concern in finding a mentor. Although I knew of the direction I wanted to take, I was unsure as to who would be able to guide my pursuits. Explaining the social justice path I hoped to follow alongside my art installation, Teresa suggested that Kristen would be an incredible voice to learn from. Although I had gained my initial inspiration from Kristen's class, I mistakenly forgot about the opportunity to discover further from her expertise. Luckily Kristen agreed to mentor my creative pursuits, as I am positive my thesis would have taken on an entirely new direction without her guidance. If not for Kristen, I know my project would have not been as successful as it was. While I mistakenly focused on specific details of my project from the start, meeting with Kristen allowed for me to gain a better perspective towards structure to my project. Previously concentrating on the creative

aspects of my thesis, she enabled discussion towards the ethnographic direction it was taking. I knew I wanted to portray the many ages of dancer, but her involvement facilitated a true connection to a clear concept. Through our meeting, we developed three very important factors to my project. The four photographs I would need from each dancer, the questions that I would ask during my interview process, and finally what I hoped to gain from my entire thesis project as a whole.

MY MISSION:

TO SHED LIGHT ONTO ONE OF THE MANY FEARS
OUR SOCIETY PROJECTS ONTO INDIVIDUALS WITHIN
THE DANCE INDUSTRY. CREATE AN INTERACTIVE
EXPERIENCE FOR MY AUDIENCE TO DEVELOP
NEWFOUND IDEAS TOWARDS THE SUBJECT OF
AGE. I DO NOT WANT MY OPINION TO INFLUENCE
END RESULT.

MY PHOTOGRAPHIC DIRECTION:

1. A PHOTO OF HANDS
2. A PHOTO OF FEET
3. A CLOSE UP OF FACE
4. MOVEMENT BASED PHOTOGRAPH

THE QUESTIONS I WOULD USE WITHIN EACH INFORMAL INTERVIEW:

1. Name age
2. What age did you first start dancing?
3. What is your first memory of dancing?
4. What is your most recent memory of dancing?
5. Why do you dance?
6. What do you enjoy about dancing?
7. What don't you enjoy about dancing?
8. What makes a "good" dancer?
9. What makes a "bad" dancer
10. What do you think is the ideal age for a dancer?
11. What do you consider a young dancer?
12. What do you consider an older dancer?
13. Some people think a younger dancer is more physically capable while an older dancer brings a sense of maturity? Do you agree? Do you think there are exceptions?
14. Are you scared of getting older as a dancer?
15. What do you imagine or hope for yourself as a dancer in the future?
16. Has your perspective changed, as you have grown older and matured within dance?
17. If you could stop time and pick any age to dance at for the rest of your life would you? What age? Why or why not?

The development of my four photographs was based upon the way in which I wanted my audience to interact within my installation. Unable to identify a stranger by their hands and feet, I simply wanted the characteristics of both of these photographs to determine age. The audience was given the opportunity to recognize wrinkles or the absence of wrinkles on skin, freckles or the absence of freckles on skin, damages, cuts, callouses on certain extremities, etc. Not only could these photos enable suggestions to age, but also to the amount of dancing an individual participated in daily. The incorporation of a

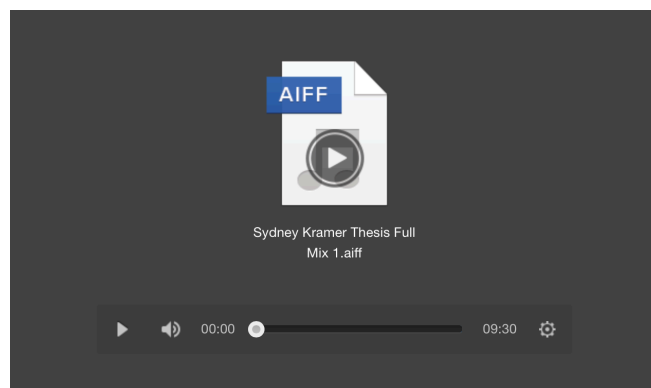
close up of face was utilized in order to gain an emotional response to the photos. I knew that by matching a face to the hands and feet, a sense of emotion from the audience would develop towards the subjects. Finally, the incorporation of a movement-based photograph ultimately proved to be the final completion of my project. I needed this image in order to develop the connection between dance and age. All together, the images allowed for my audience to compare and contrast the various ages that participated in the installation.

Although I was initially passionate towards the photographic elements of my project, it was not until my first interview experience that I knew I needed to incorporate audio into my final installation. Unaware of the way in which I would incorporate my interviews into the gallery, I originally devised a plan to print quotes as decoration for the room. Hoping that the interviews would give further depth to the concept of the photos, I developed an informal interview process. Organizing a set of questions under the implication that they would produce stories as opposed to simple answers, I developed 17 questions to ask in my informal interview process. While my first meeting was with Holland, the ten-year-old boy, I instantly knew that I would need to incorporate voice and audio recording into my project. The photographs enabled visual emotions, but the pairing of the images alongside voices felt imperative to my overall completion of the project.

Once I had completed the photographic and interview portion of my thesis, I gained the opportunity to enable my own creativity. Specific to the images I eventually chose, I wanted to create a distinct tone throughout the entirety of the work. Although separate images, I felt as though they needed to have a cohesive quality that resembled a body of work. The editing choices I made were based upon the fact that I wanted to create a specific place for my audience to look in the images. Whether the focus was drawn to a cut on a

foot, or a wrinkle under an eye, I did not want any confusion towards the process of observing. My final choice in editing was to transform all of my images to black and white. I felt as though this decision enabled clarity throughout the images, as colors did not distract away from the details of each image. The opportunity to edit and print my images gave me full control over the final product I was left with. As I assembled the images, I concluded with a body of consistent work that resembled the topic of age I strived to represent.

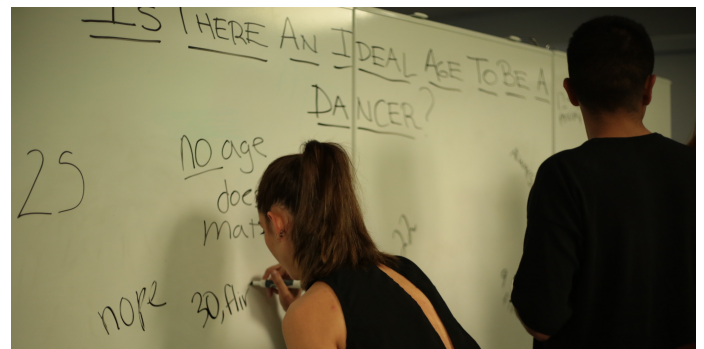
Although it was not formally stated, Professor David Karagianis became an incredible second mentor to the overall completion of an art installation. He truly guided my progression, both within the audio experience, and with the overall production of an art installation. While I had originally planned to edit my audio very simply, David elevated the entire experience to a much higher degree. Not only improving the overall sound quality of my interviews, he offered the option to pair a beautiful piece of music throughout the background of the piece. Choosing a classical piece entitled, “New Old Age,” by John Taylor, the assimilation of audio within my art installation further enabled the success of my thesis project.



Arriving two hours before my eventual presentation on April 9, 2016, I set up Foley 210 into an art gallery showcasing my photographic installation. With the help of three friends and my mom, we were able to transform a classroom into an entire gallery



experience for my audience. My team and I displayed the photos on a green screen wall, showcasing the contrast between color and black and white. I also created a video montage of the hands and feet images to display on the four televisions around the room. Covering the photos was a wall made up of a white board in which I directed my audience to listen to the audio before viewing the photos. On the back of the white board I also gave my audience the opportunity to interact with my project as they were able to write their opinion as to whether or not there was an “ideal age” to be a dancer.” As David adjusted the volume for my audio recording, individuals were able to listen to the interviews I had conducted before viewing the photographs I had developed. It was an absolutely incredible occurrence to stand back and watch as an audience partook in viewing and experiencing my art installation.



Chapter 3: Final Results

My thesis project was truly one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as a student at LMU. Though I have continued for four years to immerse myself within the dance department, the opportunities and realizations gained from this opportunity was unlike anything ever before. Because of my interview process, I was able to make further connections with various professors within the department as well as grow closer with my fellow dance peers. I also took full advantage of the resources provided by the dance department, utilizing a newly renovated media room within the Foley building of LMU. The most rewarding aspect of my thesis project was the opportunity to interview dancers from a wide variety of ages:

Beginning with Holland, the ten-year-old boy, I was overjoyed hearing his responses to the questions I developed. Although I was aware of the knowledge I had gained throughout my years as a dancer, it was incredible to reflect on the mindset I had one maintained throughout the beginning of my dance training. Seeing the similarities in artistic expression through his mind, I recognized a similar fixation on quantity versus quality within this age frame. Ecstatic towards his future within dance, it was refreshing to witness a young mind that maintained pure passion towards dance as an art form.



Next, I interviewed Damon Rago, professor and chair of the entire dance department, and Rosalynde LeBlanc Loo, professor within the dance department. Although Damon had been one of the first individuals I had met at LMU as a freshman, it was not until the opportunity to interview him that I truly began to understand the background in which he came from. Going through the questions I had constructed, almost every one of his answers reflected back to his incredible passion of teaching. No longer in the mindset of a performer, he searched for answers in order to better advise a performer for their future. His true mentality and care for his students showed through his answers within the interview. Roz, on the other hand, fully encompassed the embodiment of a performer. While I had taken her class and fortunately previously been cast in one of her pieces, Roz's entire mentality took shape as I interviewed her. Explaining her relationship and love of music, Roz's passion behind dance stemmed from a longing to conduct as a child. As she progressed within her dancing, she instead allowed for her body to conduct the music instead.



Excited to approach my fellow dancers with my interview questions, I met with Sarina Ortiz, Gigi Axelrode, and Brandon Mathis. The only difference in interviewing these individuals as opposed to my other subjects was a sense of relief towards the opportunity to make a mistake. While I felt as though I needed to maintain a professional and prepared dynamic with my professors, each of these three dancers understood the process of thesis project through the eyes of a student. I enjoyed hearing thoughts that I personally felt reiterated back to me through the minds of my fellow dancers.



My final photographic interview was with my eighty-year-old grandma, Barbara Sterling. I would be lying if I said that this was not my absolute favorite interview throughout my thesis project. My grandma brought a sense of charisma to the topic of age for dancers, sharing memories from time periods I had not gotten to experience. Referencing dancers such as Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, she employed a rich history alongside her memories towards dance. Although I had known her for the entirety of my life, I was amazed by the many stories and memories she shared with me. With an incredible elegance and grace, her photographs also took on a new demeanor as well. While most of the dancers I photographed were able to display the natural, raw essence of their being, she encompassed the beauty and refinement her generation holds to so significantly.



I will forever wish that I had taken advantage of the opportunity to interview my fellow dancers from the beginning of my enrollment within LMU. The commencement of my project immediately enabled for me to see my fellow dancers and professors in an entirely new light than ever before. Much like the focus of my thesis art installation, I felt as though I could read and interpret the minds of many individuals I had not taken the time to get to know beforehand.

If I were able to change any aspect of my project, it would have been to transform Foley 210 even further into an art gallery. In needing to respect the rules that the classroom maintained, I felt prohibited by what I was allowed to do within the space. While the televisions and audio were incredible additions to the overall appeal of my project, I would have loved to have completely reinvented the space, specific to the demands of my project. I would have used curtains throughout the entire room in order to feel as though my audience entered a black box upon arrival. As they entered the gallery, the TV's would project the black and white pictures while the audio played for them to listen to. I would have instigated this experience for about five to ten minutes before finally revealing the photographs behind one of the curtains. However, I did surprisingly enjoy the green wall in order to showcase my photos. The color added an incredible contrast to the black and white images I had produced. Although I felt as though it was a fun incorporation of the audience within my thesis project, I also would have eliminated the use of the white board wall. While it added a third dimension to my

project, I would have loved to construct a better way to utilize the minds and opinions of my audience members. Although there are thousands of small corrections I would have loved to make in the final completion of my project, I did feel extremely satisfied with the outcome. The hard work and dedication I put towards the completion of my project ultimately proved to be beneficial towards my final result. While it remains the first opportunity I had been given in order to create an art installation, I hope to further this passion within my future.



Chapter 4: Future Plans

As I embark on my journey after graduation, I can only begin to reflect on the incredible lessons I have learned through my experiences attending LMU. If it was not for Loyola Marymount and the dance department I know that I would have never been able to truly identify the individual I am today. While it may seem counterintuitive that I now no longer wish to pursue a career in dance, I can whole heartedly thank the LMU dance department for giving me a safe space to explore the true feelings I have carried within myself for many years. Through consistent self-exploration as well as the construction of my thesis project, I was able to identify a shift in mentality towards my thoughts about dance. Although once dedicating my entire being to the eventual goal of becoming a professional dancer, I could see this dream slowly beginning to shift. Fortunate enough to have incredible professors guiding me throughout my journey, many helped in my newfound feelings that I previously was unable to distinguish. Because of this, I was urged to explore the various creative and artistic courses that LMU provides for its students. Through these possibilities, I was able to utilize my love of the arts in innovative ways. Seen through the creation of my thesis project, my passion towards arts and entertainment has enabled my eventual career path within the future. Alongside my dance courses, I began to enroll in photography, public relations, music, and film classes that develop new ideas about the future as well as instigate the creation of my thesis project. In exploring the various paths each of these subjects can

lead to, I developed my current goal in becoming involved within the entertainment industry.

After graduation, I know that I will forever take the skills I have developed as a dancer alongside me for the rest of my life. Specific to skills within the work place, I have acquired talents in areas that I feel are essential to becoming successful within the entertainment industry. My dance experience has enabled me to work well under pressure, adapt to new circumstances, and learn new information within a short period of time. My acting and theatrical background has given me the ability to be personable with others, comfortable talking in a large group of people, maintain a professional attitude in difficult situations, and recognize true talent within an individual. Although I am no longer pursuing the career of a performer, the qualities I mastered have become priceless to my future.

Although I was overwhelmed with excitement once I finally recognized my dreams for the future, I went through a long period of time in which I felt as though I was mourning a passion that I had developed over such a long period of time. My brain was under the impression that if I no longer wanted to become a professional dancer, I was no longer able to enjoy dance at all. It was not until I took Careers in Dance with Kate Hutter that she sparked a newfound philosophy within my mind. Although I am not able to note her advice verbatim, she explained, “you will always be a dancer, no matter what. You will just be a dancer who is now working in the entertainment industry.” My concerns about the future seemed to miraculously make sense as I no longer felt hesitation towards my progression into a newfound career. Instead of feeling like I was

completely ignoring my past, I realized that I would now use all of the knowledge I had developed in order to thrive within another platform. From this realization, I instantly progressed both in my dancing and in my pursuits towards a career. I now and in the future use each of my dance classes as an opportunity to strengthen myself both physically and mentally.

Although currently unaware of the exact path I will take immediately after graduation, I am confident that it will be involved within the entertainment industry. My passion for dance alongside the arts has enabled my immediate desire to travel abroad for the summer. Hoping to gain an even better understanding of the entertainment industries abroad, I plan to use my entire trip to gain information on various territories throughout the world. Hoping to eventually work in international relations within a music label, I will use these skills in order to progress within a job environment. Excited to announce, I have officially been offered three positions within the music industry. My experience the past four years within the LMU dance department have prepared me for my future outside of school. I hope to bring the lessons I have learned both as an individual and throughout my dance experience in order to work professionally to the best of my abilities. My plans for the future consist of an urge to experience as much of the world as possible. Planning to eventually move to Vancouver within the next couple of years, I hope to immerse myself in the film industry aboard, further exploring my love of the entertainment industry. Having only begun to learn all of the necessities I will need in order to thrive within the world, I plan to take each day as a learning opportunity for growth. Although I cannot explain my hesitancy towards graduating, my excitement

towards the future prevails all other worries. I know that wherever I eventually work within the entertainment industry will have been impacted by my extraordinary dedication to the love I possess for dance and my dance experiences at LMU.